

What's The Deal At Stone Creek Church Part 1

Gospel Centered Vision

Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:42-47

Memory Verses: Matthew 28:19-20

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

In 1914 a man, known only now as Rev. Klapp, stepped out in faith to plant a church in Danville, Virginia. He saw a need for the Gospel and he saw a people without a church, so he followed God's call and did what needed to be done. But, over the next 10 years the church would struggle to keep a pastor and make ends meet. This flickering flame seem destined to be snuffed out before it had a chance to really shine.

Fortunately, God had other plans. In 1925 Matthew Sorrell took over as pastor of the church and the rest is history. On a Sunday in August of 1930 the church baptized over 300 people in one day and by 1940 Third Avenue Congregational Christian Church had grown to over 1200 regular weekly attenders and was most likely one of the largest and fastest growing churches in the country.

Today Third Avenue Congregational Christian Church has been renamed Stone Creek Church, and incase you can't tell, we are no longer one of the largest and fastest growing churches in the country. We aren't even the largest church on this road. But, we are growing again and it is for that reason that we think it would be a good idea to let our newer attenders, Covenant Partners, and guests get to know us a little better. It's also always a good idea to remind those of us who have been here a while, why we do what we do! So starting today and for the rest of the fall we are going to be taking you through our vision, core values, and ministries. We are going to lay it all out on the table and answer every question you may have as to what our goals are, and how we hope to achieve these goals. In short, we will answer the question that those in the community and you here this morning may very well be asking; "What's the deal at Stone Creek Church?"

And where else could we start but with our vision. Vision is so important. How can you know where you are going if you have no where to go? In the 1930's & 40's Third Avenue didn't grow by accident. Pastor Sorrell had a vision. A vision to see the lost saved and the saved disciplined. A vision to reach people at their point of need, equip the saints for the work of the ministry, and demand spiritual fruit from those who claimed Christ. This was not a church where you could merely show up and watch others engage in the cause of Christ... it was a church where your participation was expected because the Bible expected it. The vision was simple... do what the Bible says and see God do what he

does. And, man, did God show up! Hundreds, if not thousands, were saved and disciplined through the ministry of our church. Even today it's still hard to find someone in Danville who doesn't have a connection to Third Avenue Church. You can still hear the testimony of those times in the words of Anne Farmer who was just a young girl in those days. In talking with her about what the church was like then, she said to me, "it was very exciting, everyone felt like they were a part of something great, life changing even. We couldn't wait to see more people saved and baptized and we'd do just about anything we could to see it happen." Danville was experiencing revival because of what God was doing in our church.

I don't know when exactly, perhaps no one does, but somewhere along the way that vision was lost and the church declined. Why? Well, the Bible tells us clearly in **Proverbs 29:18, "where there is no prophetic vision the people cast of restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law."** When we stop looking at what God has called us to do we fall into a state of religious complacency. The vision of the Word of God keeps us on God's path. When we take our eyes off the vision we are no longer restrained to the path; we wander, we get lost. If I had to guess I would say that the pastors who came after Matthew Sorrell, although good, godly men with good intentions and good hearts, took their eyes off of the vision and stepped off the path. Perhaps in being thrilled to inherit a large church with lots of resources, they became focused on keeping what they had rather than sharing it with the community and reaching those in need. Sometimes you can have too much to see what you need. It's likely they became so inwardly focussed that they forgot about the mission of reaching those outside the walls of the church. Regardless, the vision was lost and the people cast of their restraints and 100 years after its founding Third Avenue Church almost died.

5 years ago God called me to this church as the lead pastor, I believe for one main reason, to reclaim the vision. To refocus on the great commission and reengage the community. To reclaim a heart for Christ's glory, the salvation of the lost, and the discipleship of the church. We may have changed our location, we may have changed our name, but the same spiritual blood we had at our birth in 1914 still flows in our veins. Therefore it is our responsibility to reclaim the vision, to a lesser extent, for the sake of the legacy of Third Avenue Church, and to a greater extent, for the sake of God's Glory! When we look back at what our church was able to accomplish for the kingdom 80 years ago we may be tempted to think, there's no way God can use us like that again... but this morning I'm here to tell you, **if we reclaim God's vision for the Church, the best days are not behind us but yet to come.** Let me say that again, if we reclaim God's vision for this church... the best days for Stone Creek Church are not behind us but in front of us.

This morning I want us to look at a couple of passages from the Bible

that speak directly to the vision that God has for the church and what that looks like specifically for Stone Creek Church.

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing I want us to understand is this... **God's Vision For the Universal Church Is - Make Disciples**. Before ascending into Heaven to sit at the right hand of God, Jesus made 5 statements. These 5 statements combine to form what many call the Great Commission. Jesus is basically asking his followers to finish his mission. How do we finish the mission of Christ? Let's read these 5 statements. **Mark 16:15-16, Luke 24:46-48, John 20:21, Acts 1:8**, and lastly the most popular and detailed passage; **Matthew 28:18-20**. Make Disciples!

In order to understand what God is asking of us we must first understand what God means by the word disciple? In the generic sense disciple simply means someone who follows their master or teacher. They are a student. Daniel San is a disciple of Mister Miyagi, Robin is a disciple of Batman, Obiwan Kenobi is a disciple of Yoda, and Paul was a disciple of Christ. In the Christian sense it means a worshipper, servant, and witness of Christ! **To be a disciple of Christ means that we worship him exclusively, serve him wholly, and are witnesses of his goodness to those around us.** A disciple of Christ is a Christian, which means "little Christ." We are to look like copies of our master, we should look like little Jesus' all over the place.

So, of course the implication is that we are disciples of Jesus, and if we are disciples of Jesus then we are called to make disciples for Jesus. Look at a few of the elements we see here in **Matthew 28:18-20**. the first thing we see in **verse 18** is that we've been called to make disciples by the greatest authority. Jesus has all the authority... in heaven and on earth. In the whole universe, Jesus is the boss! **Philippians 2:10** tells us that every knee will bow to him. **Revelation 19:15** tells us that the world will be judged by him. **Acts 4:12** tells us that salvation exists in no one else but him. He is the Sheriff of the Universe and we've been deputized by him to finish his work and mission.

What is my motivation to do this for him? Because the greater the authority the greater the cause. Men go to battle everyday for king and country and they don't even know the king. But we do know our King don't we? He is knowable and not only that he is our friend. We do what he's commissioned us to do because he is worthy of the call; because we love him. The more beloved the authority the greater the desire is to accomplish the mission. Why is Jesus so beloved? Look with me at **Isaiah 53:4-6**. Now if he is the greatest authority, and the most beloved authority why would you not be willing to do whatever it takes to finish his mission?

We've been authorized to make disciples by the greatest authority

and secondly, we've been called to make disciples everywhere. Look at **vs19**, and **Acts 1:8** again. We make disciples first where God has placed us (our Jerusalem) which for many of us is Danville. We reach them through personal outreach in our families, our jobs, our schools, our teams, and our neighborhoods. One ministry that highlights this is Bless Every Home where we pray for, care for, and share with our neighbors the Gospel. If you haven't registered to be a light on Bless Every Home, you should today.

Then we seek to see disciples made in the greater area (our Judea) which for many of us would be Pittsylvania County & the state of Virginia. We reach them through outreach ministries like the SBC of Virginia, and the Claire Parker Foundation. We also seek to see disciples made in culturally different areas close to us (our Samaria) which for some of us may be inner city Danville, or maybe places like Gretna. We reach them through outreach ministries like Good News, Transitions, and Care Portal. We then seek to see disciples made to the end of the earth. We do this through foreign missionary partnerships with the Lyttles in Norway House, Manitoba Canada, with the Porterfields in the Middle East, with the Dickinsons in Senegal, West Africa, with the Sanfords in Papua New Guinea, and with the O'Neils with Frontier Ventures.

So we make disciples with the authority of Jesus to the ends of the earth, but how exactly do we make disciples? In **verse 19** we are called to make disciples by baptizing them. Does this just mean all we need to do is dunk people and we've completed the mission? Well, not exactly! There are a few things that are implied here. According to scripture baptism follows salvation. Look at **Acts 2:38**. The implication is that in making disciples we do so first by sharing the Gospel with them; we must evangelize. A good tool for sharing the Gospel is the Three Circles method which some of you have been trained on. Whatever way you do it, just simply tell people about Jesus and what he's done for you! After someone becomes a follower of Christ we then explain the purpose and symbolism of baptism to them and lead them in believers baptism. Baptism is by immersion, fully dunked under water. Baptism is symbolic in nature, it represents the death of Jesus and us dying to our sins in him. It also represents the resurrection of Jesus and us being alive in him again. Look at **Romans 6:3-4**. It is an outward sign of an inward faith. Just make sure you understand that baptism doesn't save you... it is to be followed by a genuine faith in Christ as Lord.

We share the Gospel and teach about the symbolism of baptism and then following all of the initial conversion elements we settle in for the long hard work of actual disciple-making. **Verse 20** tells us that we are to make disciples through intentional discipleship. We are to teach them how the Bible says we are to follow Christ. We don't teach them to simply know things about Christ or his way. No, we teach them to obey Christ and his ways. Disciple-making means we intentionally show how to be like Christ

and then we expect to see that change in their life. **Discipleship demands transformation in the way we live.** So we make a plan for personal discipleship in our own lives and then we make a disciple-making plan for those who's lives God has placed us in.

Lastly, in **verse 20**, we've been called to make disciples boldly through the power of the Holy Spirit. We don't need to be afraid to begin relationships, have Gospel conversations, or personally disciple others. If the Holy Spirit is in us and we've been discipled it should be easy-peasy. Go and make disciples! This is God's vision for the Church... and **if we reclaim God's vision for the Church, the best days are not behind us but yet to come.**

The second thing we need to recognize today is that **God's Vision For the Local Church is Worship Together.** In the New Testament we see over 100 "one another" statements where the church is called to care for, serve, encourage, and love one another. These statements constitute what it means to be a local church. Let's look at a couple of these passages together; **Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 10:25.** Lastly let us look at the most comprehensive of these passages; **Acts 2:42-47** and see if we can form some tenets of what a local church should be.

At first glance when looking at these verses we see three main pillars; A Dependence on Christ, a desire to Reach the world, and a determination to be Transformed. As we look closer we can also see 6 core values of the local church and their relationship to these 3 main pillars. Let's walk through these together.

First, we see that we should depend on Christ through a reliance on the Word of God. In **vs42** we see that they devoted themselves to the apostles teachings. Secondly we see that we should depend on Christ in consistent prayer. Again in **vs42** we see that they devoted themselves to prayer. Thirdly, we see that the local church should depend on Christ through authentic worship. In **vs42** we see they worshipped through communion. In **vs45** we see they worshipped in serving one another. In **vs46** we see they attended corporate worship services together. And, in **vs47** we see that they attended small group worship times together where they praised God in singing. When we depend on Christ in the word, prayer, and worship we draw near to him, we become like him. **We depend on christ in all things because he is the only one who can help us be more like him.**

Fourthly, we reach the world through relational outreach. In **vs45** we see that the local church served & gave to one another as needed. In **vs47** we see that this led to them having favor with the people and the lord added to their number daily. Fifth, we see that we reach the world with strategic missions. In **vs43** we see that awe and wonders were done

through the apostles. The word apostle means, "sent one." God was using those sent for missions to see people come to Christ. The point being, we must reach people locally and people globally by whatever means necessary. In **Romans 10:14-15** we see that someone must be sent to preach in order for the lost to be saved. If we stay locally we still must send others globally. This is the purpose of the local church. C.S. Lewis put it this way; **"the church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ" – C.S. Lewis.**

Lastly, number 6, we see that we should seek to see people completely transformed through intentional discipleship. In **vs42** we see that they were devoted to fellowship. In **vs43** we see that there were wonders and signs done as they were transformed. In **vs44** we see they were completely unified in the body. In **vs45** we see how they were transformed from keepers to givers. And in **vs46** we see that they were transformed by doing life together. It's clear, when looking at the American Church, that we've done a pretty bad job sat discipleship. We can't continue to see people saved and then simply release them into the world without community. We must journey alongside them with an intentional play to see them grow in their faith and maturity in Christ. **Until we get intentional to build up one another up we will continue to see Christians fall down.** Once again, this is God's vision for every local church... that we would worship and grow together in our pursuit of seeing people saved. We must reclaim this vision! **If we reclaim God's vision for the Church, the best days are not behind us but yet to come**

Application

The whole point of the Church is that we would reach the world with the Gospel and make disciples of all nations by worshipping together in our local churches. While we encourage, build up, persevere, bear with, care for, serve, pray for, bear the burdens of, and love one another... we set an example for the world of what the Love of Christ is all about. Then we go together to reach the world with the message of the Gospel! It's not rocket science... our vision and our mission is simple! The way we state it here at Stone Creek Church is this... **Depending on Christ we will Reach our world with the Gospel to see lives completely Transformed!**

When we depend on Christ in the word, in prayer, and in worship together we will be empowered to reach others. When we determine to reach the world with the Gospel together through relational outreach and strategic missions we can see way more people transformed than we could by ourselves. When we devote ourselves to intentional discipleship together we see complete transformation as we take steps towards Christ and away from the world. These six core values are what drives everything we do here at Stone Creek Church. Relying on the Word, Consistent Prayer, Authentic Worship, Relational Outreach, Strategic Missions, and Intentional

Discipleship.

We rely on the Word because we believe the Bible is our standard not a suggestion. We consistently pray because prayer is our first response not a last resort. We authentically worship because worship is a lifestyle of joyful obedience not reluctant observance. We engage in relational outreach because evangelism is more than just inviting someone to church. We engage in strategic missions because missions is more than just writing a check. And we intentionally disciple because spiritual transformation happens best when small group fellowship is planned and expected.

Conclusion

The whole point is simple... if you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, you've been commissioned by the King of Kings and Lord of Lords to share the Gospel! The best way to do that is within a local church of people who do ministry with you.

So three questions. 1) Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? Are you a little Christ who is following him wherever he leads you? Are you dedicated to his teachings and ready to obey his commands? If not, there's never a bad time to say, I'm ready to follow Jesus!

2) If you are already a disciple of Jesus Christ and you know that without a shadow of a doubt, how are you sharing the Gospel? Do you have one or two people you are praying for, and actively relating with in order to share the Gospel with them? If not, what is keeping you from doing this?

3) And third, If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ? Are you committed to the mission and vision of a local church? Do you have a Christian support system of dedicated brothers and sisters in Christ who encourage you and pray for you and disciple you to be a better follower and witness for Christ? If not, why not?

Regardless if you are a covenant partner with us here at Stone Creek or not, the mission is the same... Depending on Christ we will reach our world with the Gospel to see lives completely transformed! Now Go and do it! Reclaim the vision! **If we reclaim God's vision for the Church, the best days are not behind us but yet to come!**